

SEM Education Winter Session

SAT Writing - Pronouns

To avoid a ticket, Alice told the police that Alice didn't realize Alice was pressing harder on the accelerator pedal because Alice had gained 40 pounds in two months.

Hopefully, reading that shows you why we need pronouns, which are words that represent other nouns. If we didn't have pronouns, everything would sound repetitive and confusing.

Here's the better version:

To avoid a ticket, Alice told the police that **she** didn't realize **she** was pressing harder on the accelerator pedal because **she** had gained 40 pounds in two months.

Here are some examples of pronouns:

	Singular	Plural
Subject Pronouns	<i>He, She, It</i>	<i>They</i>
Object Pronouns	<i>Her, Him, It</i>	<i>Them</i>
Possessive Pronouns	<i>Hers, His, Its</i>	<i>Theirs</i>
Possessive Adj. Pronouns	<i>Her, His, Its</i>	<i>Their</i>
Relative Pronouns	<i>This, That, Which</i>	<i>These, Those</i>
Reflexive Pronouns	<i>Himself, Herself, Itself</i>	<i>Themselves</i>

Don't worry about memorizing the names or types—just familiarize yourself with the words so that you can tell whether something's a pronoun or not.

You need to know only two rules for pronouns, but they're really important:

Rule 1

A pronoun must clearly stand for ONE and ONLY ONE other NOUN.

Rule 2

A singular noun must be referred to by a singular pronoun. Likewise, a plural pronoun must be referred to by a plural pronoun.

Example 1

Wrong: Whenever Jason and Alexander sit down at a buffet, **he** eats way more food.

Correct: Whenever Jason and Alexander sit down at a buffet, **Jason** eats way more food.

This example violates rule 1 because we don't know who eats more. *He* could refer to either Jason or Alexander.

In conversation, we might say something like "*He eats way more food,*" and that's grammatically fine because we know from the context of our conversation who *he* is. But on the SAT, a pronoun with no clear reference is an error.

Example 2

Wrong: Even if a student gets in early, **they** still have to maintain good grades during senior year.

Correct: Even if a student gets in early, **he or she** still **has** to maintain good grades during senior year.

In this example, rule 2 is being violated. We know that *they* obviously refers to *student*, but *they* is a plural pronoun while *student* is a singular noun. *He or she* is the singular pronoun we must use (yes, it's singular). Again, we must use singular pronouns for singular nouns and plural pronouns for plural nouns.

Example 3

Wrong: At the police station, **they** found a pile of cash stashed in her bra.

Correct: At the police station, **the inspectors** found a pile of cash stashed in her bra.

Who's *they*? Here, *they* doesn't even have a reference—it doesn't represent any noun that we can see in front of us. Sure, we could assume that *they* refers to the police, but *police* is not a noun in this sentence—it's an adjective. Remember that a pronoun **MUST** stand for an existing noun somewhere.

Example 4

Wrong: My teammate deleted my part of the essay. The next day, I confronted him about **this**.

Correct:	My teammate deleted my part of the essay. The next day, I confronted him about this deletion .
Correct:	My teammate deleted my part of the essay. The next day, I confronted him about his reasons for doing so .

In this example, it's not explicit what *this* stands for. The easiest way to fix reference errors involving *this*, *that*, *these*, or *those* is to either add the noun right after or replace the pronoun altogether with something else. By inserting the word *deletion* into the sentence, we essentially define what *this* is.

Think of pronouns as shortcuts or aliases for other files on your computer. The original file must exist for there to be a shortcut. Furthermore, the shortcut must match the file it represents. You wouldn't want to click on a shortcut only to open something other than what you were expecting.

Note
<p>The pronoun <i>it</i> can be used in the following way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was a dark and stormy night. • It took 10,000 years for the star's rays to reach us. <p>These are completely fine sentences where you shouldn't worry at all about pronoun errors.</p>

Here are a few more questions and answers so you get the hang of it:

Example 5	
Wrong:	Drunk with beer bottles in both hands, Michael slid and dropped it on the rug.
Correct:	Drunk with beer bottles in both hands, Michael slid and dropped them on the rug.
Example 6	
Wrong:	The senior class has organized their school trip to the Antarctic.
Correct:	The senior class has organized its school trip to the Antarctic.
Example 7	
Wrong:	Because the restaurant was amazingly successful, they hired more employees to run it.
Correct:	Because the restaurant was amazingly successful, it hired more employees to run it.

Example 8	
Wrong:	I got so much in the mail today. I've been opening all those since noon.
Correct:	I got so much in the mail today. I've been opening all those letters since noon.
Example 9	
Wrong:	Everyone wished that they had cheaper textbooks rather than the rip-offs that were required.
Correct:	Everyone wished that he or she had cheaper textbooks rather than the rip-offs that were required.
Example 10	
Wrong:	A good chef always takes good care of their equipment.
Correct:	A good chef always takes good care of his or her equipment.
Example 11	
Wrong:	Because the blankets got torn in the wash, we must replace it before the customer gets back.
Correct:	Because the blankets got torn in the wash, we must replace them before the customer gets back.
Example 12	
Wrong:	The lion and the tortoise were about to get into a fight when it fell down a ditch.
Correct:	The lion and the tortoise were about to get into a fight when the tortoise fell down a ditch.
Example 13	
Wrong:	Few chairs are as comfortable as that made by the Herman-Miller company.

Correct:

Few chairs are as comfortable as **those** made by the Herman-Miller company.

In this last example, *those* refers to *chairs*. Because *chairs* is plural, we need *those* instead of *that*, which is singular. It's easy to remember because you would always say *that car*, *that jet*, *that book* and *those cars*, *those jets*, *those books* rather than the other way around.

1. Despite the growing technical expertise among younger generations, trivial computer issues still need to be addresses; for example, leaving them on for too long can cause battery drainage.
A) NO CHANGE
B) computers
C) it
D) this
2. Germany, Italy, Great Britain—each of these countries was the most feared in Europe at the time they rose to power.
A) NO CHANGE
B) it rose
C) its rising
D) their rise
3. Ecologists have observed that certain wild animals do not perceive human intrusion as a threat; it has compelled them to reconsider some widely accepted theories.
A) NO CHANGE
B) they have
C) that has
D) this observation has
4. Even critics of the new bill concur that it has some productive measures that are as good as or perhaps more effective than that of the old one.
A) NO CHANGE
B) those
C) these
D) them
5. The school issues harsh warnings to students who do not call the main office when he or she is too sick to attend.
A) NO CHANGE
B) whoever is
C) they are
D) their being
6. The Israeli prime minister, like most politicians in power, regarded themselves as being more important than the officials who would deal with the daily errands.
A) NO CHANGE
B) their selves
C) himself
D) oneself

1. B
2. B
3. D
4. B
5. C
6. C